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National Intelligence Estimate

The Soviet Presence in Afghanistan: Implications for the Regional Powers and the United States

Key Judgments

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**THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGIONAL
POWERS AND THE UNITED STATES**

KEY JUDGMENTS

The full text of this Estimate
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with regular distribution.

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THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps

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SCOPE NOTE

This Estimate assesses the implications of a continued Soviet military presence in Afghanistan through 1990 for the regional powers—Pakistan, India, Iran, and the Arab world—and for the United States. It addresses the implications of the Soviet invasion in terms of the following questions:

- How has the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan influenced the regional powers' strategic perspectives and threat assessments?
- What impact has the Soviet presence in Afghanistan had on regional rivalries, especially that between India and Pakistan?
- What options do the Soviets have to manipulate the policies and internal politics of the regional states, and what are Moscow's prospects for success?
- How would domestic instability or changes in government of the regional states affect their policies toward Afghanistan and the Soviets?
- How are US interests affected by the policies of the regional powers, and by Soviet attempts to manipulate the domestic politics and conflicts of these regional powers?

The Estimate examines Moscow's policy options in Afghanistan only as far as they affect regional actors and is not intended to be predictive of all aspects of Soviet regional policies through 1990 or beyond.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

After nearly 150 years of intermittent competition between Russia and Western powers in Central Asia and Afghanistan, the Soviet Union now occupies Afghanistan with a large army, is strategically positioned between Iran and Pakistan, is the only great power on the ground militarily in the region, and is 300 miles away from the Indian Ocean.¹

Moscow's efforts to consolidate Soviet control over Afghanistan will increase the potential for regional instability and conflict during the next five years. The Soviets will continue their efforts to move events in the region in their favor and will increase the pressure on regional actors through military and political means as well as intimidation and subversion.

Should the Soviets consolidate their control over Afghanistan, they will enhance their strategic and regional position and place themselves in a stronger position for pursuing other regional objectives at the expense of US interests. Even if Moscow would only gain modest strategic military advantages during the next five years, military or political success toward consolidating their position would place the Soviets in a better position to intimidate Afghanistan's neighbors and to meddle in their affairs. All the regional powers—including India and the Persian Gulf countries—would have to take into consideration the proximity of Soviet power and Moscow's demonstrated willingness to use force to achieve Soviet objectives.

Regional Reaction to Invasion

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has created a new strategic situation that has already had a major impact on regional politics and on the strategic interests of powers outside Southwest Asia:

- The invasion sparked an Afghan insurgency that has grown in size and effectiveness and which prevents the Soviets from consolidating their control.
- Pakistan, as a result of providing vital sanctuary and support for the Afghan insurgents and supporting US objectives in the region, is now in confrontation with the Soviets.

¹ The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, is in agreement with this Estimate but believes it important to point out that the Soviet efforts to consolidate control in Afghanistan will be very difficult during the five-year period of the Estimate and will most likely have negative effects on the Soviet Union's position throughout the region and its ability to enhance its strategic position. Much of this is spelled out in the remainder of the Key Judgments.

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- The Soviet threat to Pakistan from Afghanistan provided strong impetus to the resurrection of US-Pakistani security ties that now include closer strategic cooperation and significant US military assistance.
- US military aid for Pakistan has in turn increased India's suspicions of both US and Pakistani intentions, has contributed to greater Indo-Pakistani tensions, and has led to a closer—though still limited—convergence of some Indian and Soviet interests in weakening Pakistan.
- The invasion set back Soviet efforts to improve relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf region and with China. Saudi Arabia and China both provide aid to the Afghan insurgents through Pakistan, and the Saudis have increased their assistance to Islamabad.

The very process by which Moscow attempts to further consolidate its power in Afghanistan will have ongoing strategic impact on the region.

Prospects and Implications of Soviet Consolidation

There is a range of opinion within the Intelligence Community about whether the Soviet Union will be able to consolidate its position in Afghanistan beyond the period of this Estimate. If the Soviet Union can further consolidate its position, Moscow's prospects for achieving long-term strategic objectives in the region would increase:

- Firmly establishing Afghanistan within Moscow's "empire" would demonstrate the Soviets' resolve and increase fears among regional states about Soviet expansionism.
- Moscow would be in a stronger geographic position to further expand its political influence in the region, in some cases at the expense of US influence.

Within the time frame of this Estimate, the USSR will steadily improve its military infrastructure in Afghanistan to support its regional defense requirements and ability to project power. Major improvements in air and logistic facilities and the deployment of additional forces would be essential for the Soviets to undertake and sustain large-scale operations from Afghanistan into Pakistan or Iran.

Over the next five years, the Soviets' improvements in the logistic infrastructure in Afghanistan will improve their capabilities against the resistance and could also support Soviet military operations against Iran

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and Pakistan. Over the longer term the military significance of Afghanistan as a forward base will grow. However:

- The difficult terrain, rudimentary transportation network, and poor logistic facilities in Afghanistan, together with the range limitations of tactical aircraft currently in the Soviet inventory, limit the strategic military advantages that the Soviets would derive from victory in Afghanistan in the near term.
- Logistic and terrain difficulties would also limit the use of Afghanistan as a forward base for a land invasion of Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, Iran.
- However, beginning in the late 1980s, expected improvements in Soviet tactical aviation—including an air-refueling capability—would allow aircraft launched from Afghanistan to support Soviet military operations in the Persian Gulf region, improving existing capabilities.

Military and Diplomatic Costs to Moscow

So far, however, the invasion has resulted in significant military and diplomatic costs for Moscow that offset potential strategic gains. The regional reaction to the Soviet invasion and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan has been uniformly negative. This has given the United States an opportunity to make some concrete, though still modest, gains in its relations with several of these states. Continued US interest and commitment, appropriate to the variety of states in question, is perceived by the regional states as critical to their continued opposition to the Soviets in Afghanistan.

To date, Moscow's invasion has incurred the following military and diplomatic costs:

- Five years after the invasion, the Soviets and their puppet regime in Kabul still do not control most of Afghanistan, and their combat losses—while still relatively small—are increasing.
- The invasion helped provoke an enhanced US commitment to regional security, complicated Indo-Soviet relations, and has rekindled suspicions about Soviet ambitions in the Arab world.
- US military planning and force structuring for contingencies in the Persian Gulf have been given increased impetus by the invasion.

Projected Soviet Policy in Afghanistan

The judgments in this Estimate are based on our belief that, during the next five years, the Soviets will neither withdraw from Afghanistan,²

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nor succeed in reducing significantly the level of Afghan resistance. The USSR may marginally improve its political military position in Afghanistan and will take whatever steps are necessary to avoid a severe deterioration of its military position in Afghanistan.

Specifically, we believe that:

- The Soviets will not withdraw from Afghanistan because such a move would represent a clear failure of Soviet policy and force of arms both at home and abroad.
- The Soviets will not be willing to make the type of concessions that would permit a political compromise acceptable to the Afghan resistance.
- The Afghan resistance will increase its effectiveness against the Soviets as it becomes better armed and trained.
- Unless the Soviets are faced with a serious deterioration in their military position, we still expect them to make continued incremental increases—of perhaps 10,000 men per year—in their troop strength. Should resistance capabilities improve significantly and the Soviets face a deteriorating military situation, however, they could consider even larger increases in troop strength and stepped-up pressure against Pakistan.
- Nevertheless, we do not believe the Soviets will opt for a massive reinforcement of the approximately 115,000 men now in Afghanistan because of the likely diplomatic, economic, and military costs. To use military force alone to crush the resistance would, in our judgment, require 400,000 to 500,000 troops.

Pakistan

The Soviets will concentrate on political and military efforts to stop the flow of men and supplies across Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan. To accomplish these objectives, the Soviets probably will:

- Increase cross-border air and artillery strikes into Pakistan and probably support limited ground incursions in an attempt to undermine the Pakistani public's support for the Afghan resistance and confidence in President Zia.
- Step up subversion to weaken the Zia regime and try to help a pliable civilian government—which would be more accommodating to Moscow's interests—come to power in Islamabad.

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- Seek ways to reinvigorate Baluchi, Pushtun, and Sindhi separatist tendencies in order to threaten the unity of Pakistan.
- Foster tensions between India and Pakistan.

Soviet policy choices will be affected by Moscow's view of Pakistan's political stability and weaknesses, US-Pakistani ties, Indo-Soviet relations, and its own limited resources in Pakistan:

- Moscow would view Zia as more vulnerable to pressure if he were to become seriously weakened politically.
- The Soviets would be wary that too tough a policy could strengthen Zia, as well as US-Pakistani security ties, and possibly lead to a confrontation with the United States.
- Further, Moscow would not want its actions against Pakistan to result in major strains in its relations with India, and especially not in closer Indian ties to the United States.

Pakistan's resistance to greater Soviet pressure will depend principally on its perceptions of US support:

- Zia's Afghan policies are predicated on tying the Soviets down in Afghanistan in the interests of Pakistan's own security. His willingness to run the risks of increased tensions with the USSR reflect in part his hope that the United States will reciprocate with a full commitment to his regime—against India as well as against the Soviets.
- The Pakistanis will continue to press for additional arms and would expect more direct US military help—including logistic support and possibly a show of force—if the Soviets conduct cross-border operations.

As long as Zia remains in power and so long as he feels he can rely on US support, Pakistan is unlikely to alter its policy on Afghanistan or reduce its ties to the United States. However, a major internal crisis or an erosion of public support for the Afghan cause might compel Islamabad to alter its policies even if it had US backing:

- Another military regime might be more likely than Zia to adopt a conciliatory policy toward Moscow and Kabul.
- A leftist civilian government—which is least likely to come to power in the next five years—would be most willing to reach agreement with Moscow and Kabul.

Moscow's efforts to bully Pakistan into changing its tough policy on Afghanistan have so far been counterproductive and are likely to face

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continuing difficulties. The threat to Pakistan from an alien and "anti-Islamic" Soviet force in Afghanistan has worked to:

- Strengthen national unity by rallying Pakistanis to a government confronting a foreign force—the threat serves to help Zia retain control.
- Strengthen Pakistan's security and economic relationships with the United States, China, and the conservative Persian Gulf Arabs, with visible benefits of economic assistance and improvement in Pakistan's armed forces.
- Complicate Soviet-directed subversive efforts.
- Defuse the Pushtunistan separatist issue.
- Encourage Pakistan to seek better relations with India.

A Pakistani accommodation with Moscow would have major strategic implications for the United States:

- The Afghan resistance would be severely weakened without Pakistan as a sanctuary and supply base.
- A much wider expansion of Soviet control over Afghanistan would be virtually assured, although some level of resistance would continue.
- Pakistan would become less supportive overall of US strategic interests.

India

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi would like both the USSR and the United States to end their involvement in South Asia. At least over the near term, however, the consequences of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan—notably US security assistance to Pakistan—may serve as a basis for the de facto convergence of some Indian and Soviet objectives. India and the Soviet Union both want, for different reasons:

- Weakening of Pakistani security ties to the United States.
- Establishment of a more pliant government in Pakistan.
- An end to the Afghan insurgency.

The Soviets have tried to heighten India's suspicions about Pakistan's intentions and its security relationship with the United States in order to foster Indo-Pakistani tensions and heighten New Delhi's dependence on Moscow. In the Soviet view, conflict between India and Pakistan would work toward solving Moscow's Afghan problem and would give Moscow opportunities to strengthen its position in South Asia.

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The Soviets would almost certainly condone even an Indian preemptive strike against Pakistan's nuclear facilities in the belief that it served Moscow's interests by weakening Pakistan. However, a preemptive Indian attack on Pakistani nuclear facilities is unlikely in the near term.

Even without Soviet encouragement, India's suspicions of Pakistan and the United States and its dependence on Soviet arms will persist and could even increase as a result of closer US-Pakistani security cooperation. Some in New Delhi believe this cooperation has already acquired a dynamic independent of Afghanistan. Nonetheless, India is likely to become increasingly concerned about long-range Soviet intentions in the region, and could find itself moving toward confrontation with the Soviets if Pakistan were effectively neutralized:

- New Delhi regards Pakistan as a strategic buffer against the USSR and would oppose Moscow's efforts to dominate Pakistan.
- New Delhi and Moscow could find themselves supporting rival factions within Pakistan.
- The Indians would seek to significantly reduce their dependence on Moscow and reorder their strategic relationship with the USSR, the United States, and China if they perceived Soviet ambitions as extending beyond Afghanistan toward the subcontinent.

Iran

Soviet relations with Iran probably will be more determined by bilateral issues other than Afghanistan. Nonetheless:

- Soviet pressure on Iran probably will intensify if Tehran increases its support for the Afghan resistance. Greater Soviet pressure would be unlikely, however, to cause Tehran to change its Afghan policies.
- Iran might increase its aid to the insurgents once its war with Iraq is over, but Iran's support is not nearly as crucial to the resistance as Pakistan's.
- Should Pakistan cease support to the Mujahedin, Iranian support would become critical to the survival of the insurgency but would not begin to replace current supply levels through Pakistan.

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Arab States

Soviet success in controlling Afghanistan would heighten Arab concerns about Moscow's intentions in the Middle East. However, the potential for US-Arab strategic cooperation—and Arab views of Soviet policies—will be influenced much more by Arab-Israeli and Gulf war issues than by the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states will continue to back Pakistan in its support for the Afghan resistance.

China

Beijing views the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an ominous extension of Moscow's military assertiveness that threatens China's broader strategic interests. China will continue to support Islamabad's role in aiding the insurgents, but has limited potential for helping Pakistan in the face of greater Soviet pressure. The Chinese, however, would not want Pakistani policy to result in successful Soviet efforts to neutralize Pakistan because Islamabad's role as Beijing's key South Asian ally is even more important to China than its role in opposing the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Implications for the United States

Pakistan is likely to continue to oppose the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan as long as it perceives it has continued strong US support. Even Iran, which may feel compelled to move to improve its relations with the Soviets, will continue to support the withdrawal of Soviet troops from its neighbor. For the new Indian leadership, however, the US-Pakistani security relationship will hamper any reassessment by India of its public position on Afghanistan.

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